



Gender Impact on Female Graphic Designers' Career Satisfaction

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Abstract: *According to previous studies on female graphic designers' career development, the majority of female designers hold basic or middle positions in the workplace, and many of them give up design work at a range of development stages for various reasons (Zhao Yue, 2014). Factors such as social contexts, gender stereotypes, education and work environment, and recruitment and retention affect their careers (Trauth, E.M, Quesenberry J.L. and Huang H, 2006); however, other possible factors can also impact their career process. The purpose of this study is to explore the possible reasons for career satisfaction, or lack thereof, in the graphic designers' subconscious, and to explore the connection between the internal and external factors. A case study was conducted in two groups; one group is graphic design students from universities in China and Finland, and another group is from the graphic design workforce in both countries. This paper concludes by describing the impact of female designers' gender consciousness and subconsciousness, cultural differences and career choices, and ideal career life and real career life, and it aims to confirm the inner factors that contribute to female designers' lower positions in the workplace.*

Keywords: *Female Graphic Designer, Career Choice, Culture Differences, Ideal and Real Career Life, Gender Conscious, Gender Subconscious.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The global trend of lower representation of women in the workforce is well known; it is also true in the Graphic Design (GD) field. This is a significant problem and has been of great concern to educators, practitioners, and researchers in the GD field. Many studies have been undertaken to determine the reasons for female graphic designers' under representation in the workforce. The confirmed reasons include social contexts, gender stereotypes, education and work environment, and recruitment and retention (Trauth, E.M, Quesenberry J.L. and Huang H, 2006). However, to a certain extent, gender inequality presents a natural form in social life. Hearn and Niemi argue there are many organizations consisting mostly of men (as in any patriarchy) but usually without any explicitly articulated, conscious awareness or agenda explicitly linked to male gender. Such politics, movements, organizations, and groups of men are not explicitly gender-conscious; they supposedly "just happen" as "normal" ways of doing things in government, business, and civil society (Hearn & Niemi, 2006). This suggests that some of the phenomenon of unbalanced gender status is not concerned with conscious behavior; rather, it is a natural behavior or it is concerned with participants' unconscious decisions. Nonetheless, these decisions affect women's career processes and workplace treatment.

GD has been depicted as a unified thinking and creativity that involves idea generation, image creation, word interpretation, and media realization, for industry, commerce, culture, and society. Communication, with its theories, models, methods, and practices, is also recognized as central to the process of making meaningful representation (Lang, 2007). Lawson (2006), Cross (2002), and Dorst and Cross (2001) explore design activity, comparing it with architecture, engineering, and product design; GD is described as tool-mediated activities that graphic designers undertake when solving "ill-structured" problems in client-initiated projects (Simon, 1973). Therefore, GD is concerned more with thinking than action, and according to previews study, male and female designers have same professional requirements and similar qualities in the GD field, which means GD has no special for male and female designers, but contrastively, male and female GD designers have quite different career processes (Zhao Yue, 2014). In order to explore the influential factors on female GD designers'

different career processed contrast with males', apart from the influential factors listed above, it is worth exploring if there are other potential factors affecting female GD designers' career processes and what kind of relationships exist between these influential factors. This study will explore these questions by conducting a case study with female GD students and designers in Finland and China. Analysis of the data from 202 female participants reveals a wide range of influences on women's career process. Additionally, the results will compare a global perspective that takes into account the influence of cultural background.

The low representation of women in the GD market suggests a need for research into female designers' career choices. Further, the globalization of the GD market needs to consider these gender issues in a cross-cultural context. Hence, this study explores the issues through a case study from two perspectives: the cultural contexts in which these issues arise; and the internal and external demands involved in these issues. The motivations for studying gender in GD from these two perspectives are threefold: 1) to address cultural context from a sociological perspective; 2) to address the gender conscious and subconscious influence from a sociological perspective; and 3) to address gender and GD issues from a psychological perspective.

2. METHODS

In order to address the research question, the author examined cross-cultural datasets in two field studies, China and Finland, among GD students and designers. Quantitative data collected from universities in both countries involved 126 participants responding to questionnaires focusing on GD students' focus on, feelings about, and plans for their professional studies and future career life. Qualitative data was collected by face-to-face, open-ended interviews with 76 female GD designers from both countries. The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and investigated the participants' educational process, work experiences, results evaluation, and career expectations regarding gender and GD. The interviews explored the participants' backgrounds, personal characteristics, and broader themes of gender and GD.

The data from both countries were used as a multicultural dataset for this paper with 58% of responses from China and 42% from Finland. These women represent a wide range of demographics and personal characteristics. The age range is from 22 to 60 years old. All of the participants have a GD educational background and third level qualifications. The women represent a diverse background of GD work experience including designers, illustrators, art directors, creative directors, managers, freelance workers, students, and educators. Based on their cultural backgrounds, these female designers provide information on rich cross-cultural influences that are manifested in their professional lives.

Table1. *GD students from Chinese and Finnish Universities*

Total number: 126	China			Finland		
	57%			43%		
	Bachelor degree	Master degree	PhD degree	Bachelor degree	Master degree	PhD degree
	47%	47%	6%	56%	39%	6%

Table2. *Interviewed GD designers from China and Finland*

Total number: 76	China					
	61%					
	GD designer	Art director	Creative director	GD freelancer	Entrepreneur	Other work related with GD
	35%	20%	8%	16%	12%	9%
	Finland					
	39%					
	GD designer	Art director	Creative director	GD freelancer	Entrepreneur	Other work related with GD
	30%	24%	10%	14%	12%	10%

To demonstrate how these factors are manifested in the career lives of female GD practitioners, we discuss four themes: cultural influences and personal characteristics, ideal career life and real career life, consciousness and subconsciousness, gender awareness and career choice. We explore these themes for several reasons. First, we build on the prior theory of gender psychology by investigating

the influence of gender consciousness and subconsciousness on women's GD career choices. In doing so, we explore internal and external factors in both a positive and negative sense. Second, the themes represent a range of diverse influences, such as historical and cultural, economic and political, and personal and domestic contexts. Finally, the themes demonstrate the importance of considering psychological perspectives in gender and GD research as it is a profound influencing factor in women's career choices in GD.

3. RESULTS

As a manipulation check on career, gender, and cultural background items, we use these items as the independent variables and use the respondents' different perspectives on each topic as the dependent variable. A significant effect on career choice was obtained on the equivalence relationship between culture, occupational nature, and gender status quo. These comparisons confirmed the interaction between the items in the expected directions.

The results of the study are presented in the following two sections corresponding to the purposes of the investigation: (a) the exploration of correlates of cultural penetration and career aspiration and (b) the analysis of the relationship between gender awareness and career choice.

3.1. Participants' Backgrounds

3.1.1. Studying and Work Experience

All the participants have a university background. In the Finnish responses, 22% of students have had a whole day's work experience, 29% of designers have worked in the same agency for more than 5 years, 14% of designers work freelance, and 12% of designers are entrepreneurs. In the Chinese responses, 5% of students have had a whole day's work experience, 22% of designers have worked in the same agency for more than 5 years, 16% of designers work freelance, and 12% of designers are entrepreneurs. Comparing these data from both countries, Chinese designers change their employer more frequently than Finnish designers do; this is largely due to the fact that Chinese design market has a relatively short development time and a rapid pace of change, so it still has a certain degree of immaturity, designers change workplace in order to find a more suitable path for their career. Chinese students seldom have a whole day of work experience; almost all of them are selected from high school; among the 72 Chinese design students, only 4 of them had whole day work experience before going to university. This may explain why the turnover rate is higher in China than it is in Finland. Additionally, a university qualification is an important factor in gaining employment in China, so some of the students choose to study in university to get a job rather than for a specific career. This is also a very important factor in the career change after graduation, and this phenomenon is not related to gender.

3.1.2. Choice of Profession

In terms of choice of profession, almost all of the Finnish students were clear on their chosen area of interest, only one student was unclear; 92% of the Finnish students expressed an interest in working in the field. In comparison, 85% of the Chinese students expressed an interest in working in the field. Of those already working in the field, 92% of Chinese GD designers were doing so based on interest; the second reason for choosing GD is to get a job. According to the data from both countries, Chinese participants choose a profession for job security and income rather than for interest more than the Finnish participants do. This suggests GD trends in China are based on economic factors rather than on gender-related trends more than Finnish do.

3.2. Female GD Designers' Ideal Career Life

3.2.1. Career Plan

A considerable number (97%) of respondents have a career plan; 75% of them currently want to work in GD (among these, 24% plan to run their own company, and others want to be entrepreneurs or continue work as a graphic designer in a company or as a freelancer); 16% of them want to be graphic design teachers; 5% of them want to be professional artists; and 4% choose other fields not related to art; 21% of female designers want to change to positions such as illustrator, artist, or teacher, which they consider less competitive fields than GD. Additionally, 15% of the participants would like to be a freelancer because "the environment is more peaceful and more inspiring than working in an office", and they prefer working alone. It should be noted that a comparatively large number of respondents

(75%) adhered to their original career choice to progress in the GD field, and they have long term expectations.

The obvious differences between the Chinese and Finnish participants is that the Chinese designers are more likely to choose stable work, such as design teaching, which has good social status, a good salary, and lower risk than designing in general. Of the participants who want to be a GD teacher, 70% of them are from China, and 30% are from Finland.

3.2.2. The Person Female GD Designers want to be

When asked who they would like to be, most of the participants gave positive answers, such as, "I can be who I want to be" and "I'm really the one I want to be". Approximately 30% of the participants think that they can be better than they currently are: "I need to be a person who works harder, and especially a more organized person. I need a better routine" and "I'm pretty ok with myself, although I could be more daring".

The differences between the Chinese and Finnish participants is that more Chinese participants think that they would be better than they currently are if there were fewer influences from family and society: "If I was a man, I'd be better than me", "If a wife and husband had equal opportunities in the family, I could do as well as my husband, or even better than him". Such differences indicate that Chinese women encounter greater gender-based barriers, and are more eager to overcome them, than Finnish women do and are.

According to the data, it appears that the majority of female designers feel they can be who they want to be and they have hopes of improving; those who wish to improve hope to do so in terms of being braver and more confident.

3.2.3. Best Choice and Lifelong Career

When asked whether GD is the best choice of career, 62% of the participants answered yes, and 38% are not sure but they still think it is interesting work. For GD students, 67% of female students said that being a graphic designer is their best choice because it meets their interests, and GD is the creative field they love; 26% of female students are not sure whether it is the best choice even they though they do well and get good evaluations from their clients; and 7% of the students say it is not the best choice. The data reveals that the percentage of positive answers is similar in the two countries with no designers saying it is not the best choice and only a few students saying they are not sure if it is the best choice. The obvious difference between the two countries is that the proportion of Chinese students who gave a negative answer (10%) is much higher than the proportion of Finnish students who did so (4%), and this negative answer is related to their reasons for choosing to study GD.

When asked about GD as a lifelong choice, 74% of designers said it is their life-long career: "This is something I'm actually good at and I imagine that I will still be drawing logo sketches and designing books when I'm like 70 years old". Over half of participants use the words "hope" or "wish", and reveal their worries about their lifelong career: "I'm afraid it won't be always up to me", "Lifelong but hard when you get older unless you are a star". Finally, 30% of designers are not sure about their future because of market concerns or their ability to work as they get older.

Comparing the data between China and Finland, the results are similar: the positive proportion of Chinese designers is a little bit lower than Finnish designers on the point of whether GD design is the best choice. This result reflects the same context as the above analysis on the reasons for choice of profession.

3.3. Female GD Designers' Real Career Life

3.3.1. Current Situation

Most of the interviewed designers are satisfied with their current situation; they feel stimulated and creative. They use words such as "love", "great", "enjoy", "satisfied", "very happy" to describe their attitude to their design situation. About 20% of them think that it is competitive and worry about money because of the competitive market, their age, and welfare policy.

In terms of the GD market, designers are more satisfied with their situation than students are. The students have not yet entered the design market or they have less experience in the market, so they have not gained acknowledgement or confidence in their professional career. According to the data on

this point, female GD students have less confidence in their profession and cannot predict their future career. In addition, female students are not sufficiently self-assured about their future, and they express the need “to be more confident” and “braver”.

In terms of salary, Chinese female designers earn the same as male designers but Finnish female designers earn less than male designers. However, it is very difficult for Chinese women to climb the career ladder. The stereotype that it is the woman's responsibility to take care of the home is more prevalent in China than it is in Finland. In order to have as successful a career as men have, Chinese women have to spend much more energy.

3.3.2. Barriers

According to the data, most of the designers think that there is no barrier to their career: “It's all self-driven”. For young designers who have been working for fewer than three years, the barriers they face are lack of work experience, work skills, and money to improve their work capability. Contrastively, for older designers the main barrier is age: “Design is for the young”, “I am starting to worry if my age is going to be an issue in the future, I hope not. I am ambitious about my work...but I don't have the energy”. These findings suggest the barriers to career success are not based on gender issues.

However, according to data on gender equality, a more far-reaching factor is the unequal gender market in which men are better paid and women are in lower positions. The reason for that is that “Agencies like to employ more male designers” or “the title is the same, but the salary is different for men and women”. The unequal treatment of men and women in the GD market results in environmental conditions that cause a vicious cycle, which leads to some young designers accepting this unfairness subconsciously.

Comparing the data from both countries, Chinese female GD designers are more concerned about having children and view family responsibilities as an important barrier to their career development: “GD agencies like to employ male designers because they do not need to give birth and take care of babies as women”, “in a Chinese family, wives always take care of the children and parents much more than husbands do”. The influence of family factors is far greater in China than it is in Finland.

3.3.3. Chances in the Market

According to the data, other factors influence female designers' career development. The unfair treatment that women experience in other fields also exists in the GD workplace. Participants feel that “the field of graphic design should give more recognition to female designers”, and there should be an end to the practice of giving men better positions and higher salaries, especially in Finland. Another issue is that “not many female designers are good at marketing themselves” and “...women are more sensitive. We aren't as brave at taking chances (as men), and our salaries aren't as good as male designers because we don't ask for better salaries”; “Women should demand more and be less ‘apologetic’ for their work and existence”. However, the participants think gender is not the most influential factor on their career: “...gender does not make top designer's quality better or worse, but it might influence the way careers are formed. Men are more demanding, and, in the long run, that makes a big difference. Female designers might be less self-centered admiration seekers”. Finally, many participants suggested a need for greater self-belief: “Women should be more brave and self-confident, because we are just as good designers as men are”, “Believe in your strength, aim high” and “Don't copy others, BE YOURSELF, because it's your uniqueness that matters”.

Comparing the data from both countries, the key words like “brave”, “confident”, “market yourself”, and “aim directly” appeared in both sets of participants. Despite different backgrounds of education, social environment, and culture, the requirements for a successful career are very similar. The two countries differ in that Chinese woman have similar salaries and opportunities for promotion as men have, but men tend to be preferred by agencies. The older Chinese designers felt family responsibilities are their main burden. Female designers in China have more chances in the GD market, but they have more domestic responsibilities than the Finnish female designers have.

These results indicate female designers are not concerned with their professional skills or ability but with their expectations and courage to pursue a career while battling social expectations.

3.3.4. Influences on Personal Decisions

According to the data from Finland, half of the participants made decisions fully based on themselves:

“I make my decision based on what I feel and want, not my surroundings”. And half of them said that they made decisions based on both themselves and others: “Both have an effect, mainly on my own decisions”; “I have taken advice from my parents, siblings, or my boyfriend”. According to the data from China, 70% of the participants said that their decisions combined the influences from both their surroundings and their own needs, and 30% said that their decisions are based on themselves. According to this investigation, women are easily influenced by others who are close to them that they trust: their parents, boyfriend, etc., and sometimes they need their encouragement, support, and advice.

Comparing the data from both countries, the influencing factors are quite similar, but the apparent difference is that Chinese female designers' decisions are influenced more by their surroundings, mainly their parents, especially when they are young or at the beginning of their careers.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this investigation indicate that the exploration of career process, career evaluation, and surrounding context, as well as applying gender psychology theory, was productive in studying female GD designers' career choices, and helped to analyze what they really want in the GD field. The investigation of the designers' cultural background and social status was also useful in explicating group differences. The comparison of gender cognition in the context of different cultures, and the analysis of the differences between value evaluation and value expectation, are also useful in explicating the differences between gender consciousness and gender subconsciousness, which affect female GD designers' career development extensively.

4.1. Gender Consciousness

According to the analysis above, female designers have strong gender awareness, even though they said that they do not care about the stereotype of gender conception; their behavior, such as their career choice and family issues, shows that they care about gender greatly. Their gender consciousness comes from their parents, society, circumstances, and culture. Gender consciousness in Chinese female designers is deeper than it is in Finnish designers; this is mainly because China has a long gender history that contributes to deep gender consciousness; after thousands of years, these traditions continue to influence gender conception. Chinese female designers care deeply about gender education and gender equality, and they ask for more equal opportunities in the workforce.

4.2. Gender Subconsciousness

In psychology, the subconscious is the part of consciousness that is not currently in focal awareness. Psychologist Pierre Janet (1859-1947) argued that underneath the layers of critical thought functions of the conscious mind lay a powerful awareness that he called the subconscious mind (Ellenberger, 1970). In the context of this study, the gender subconscious stems from the gender conscious. Locke et al. write that there is a limit to what can be held in conscious focal awareness, so an alternative storehouse of one's knowledge and prior experience is needed, which they label the subconscious (Gollwitzer, Peter M.; Bargh, John A, 2014). From the above analysis, we can see that female designers' gender consciousness stems from reactions promoted by external factors. However, their gender subconsciousness is an unconscious reaction that results from a long-term external effect, and it can become a reaction that is not affected by objective conditions. According to this study, the majority of the female designers think they have the same ability as male designers have in the GD field, and that their unequal status is mostly due to unfair treatment in the market and in their social options. However, their responses also reveal their gender subconsciousness; the questions concerned the kinds of barriers to their success and the factors influencing their decisions, and all the responses indicate that their gender subconscious is a major factor influencing their behavior in the GD market as it made them less ambitious, less demanding, and less confident. Therefore, gender consciousness influences their appearance; gender subconsciousness is their inner cause that influences their career life in life long.

4.3. Career Ideals and Reality

The analysis of career plans indicates that female GD students' career plans are not significantly influenced by gender; rather it is largely a personal project which is not concerned with gender. Older designers evaluate the career more in terms of their gender than younger designers do, and their evaluation of their current situation is also based on gender constraints to a certain extent. The special

pattern of the results suggests that the differences between career plan and career reality is on gender context, which means that the difference between ideal career life and real career life is related to gender issues. The influencing factors are both external (culture, social, and the market) and internal (gender consciousness and subconsciousness and value expectation and evaluation); the two sets of factors have mixed effects and work in mutual transformation, which influences female GD designers' career development.

4.4. Value Expectations and Value Evaluation

In this study, value expectation means what kind of person female GD designers want to be and what they plan to do. Value evaluation means how society values female GD designers or how female GD designers value themselves. The differences between value expectations and value evaluation may be key in determining what female designers' really want, and the differences showing the impact of gender awareness on their value conception and value realization. Therefore, this could have important counseling implications. For example, the suggestions for female designers could be useful in improving their competitiveness in the career process; the analysis of barriers could be useful in determining a more suitable career path. Specifically, this study indicates the role of gender awareness in the subconscious. This approach could also be helpful in identifying what the most influential factor in female GD designers' career choices and career development is.

5. CONCLUSION

The results presented in this paper contribute to GD research that is focused on gender and GD careers. It responds to the call for addressing issues from a broader perspective by examining internal and external influences on gender and GD issues. The analysis of four themes reveals a wide range of influences on women's GD career choices based on culture and psychology. These results reinforce the need to consider the interaction effect of internal factors and external factors on female GD designers' career development. Moreover, these results lend further support to the notion that cultural differences contribute to different designers' careers, and the aforementioned findings both corroborate and extend the view that the inequality of female designers is based on the dual effects of internal and external factors. Collectively, the particular findings from different groups in this investigation are congruent with the distinguishing characteristics of this group reported by others.

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